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First Release of Rarely-Seen Episodes of “Kukla, Fran and Ollie” from 1949-54

NEW YORK – The Burr Tillstrom Copyright Trust, in collaboration with The Kuklapolitan Website, announces the first release of the earliest episodes of the Peabody and Emmy-award-winning *Kukla, Fran and Ollie*, one of the most highly regarded shows of early television, and the first series produced in Chicago to receive national attention. The two-DVD set of 20 digitally restored episodes, which have never been commercially available in any format, will be released Nov. 20, 2010, through Amazon.com and the Chicago History Museum.

KFO is unique in television history: a live, ad-libbed, daily puppet show actually watched by more adults than children. Filled with references to the theater, opera, and current events, it counted Orson Welles, Katharine Hepburn, John Steinbeck, Tallulah Bankhead, and Adlai Stevenson among its many adult fans.

How did a puppet show originally aimed at children become “appointment television” for millions of adults? Two words: Burr Tillstrom. His ability to create over twenty distinct characters and voices (he was the only puppeteer) and his rapport with Fran Allison (the show’s only onscreen human) were essential to the show’s humor and believability.

Today, it’s hard to imagine a simple puppet show being so popular, but KFO evoked loyalty and a deep belief in its characters from viewers. After Kukla sneezed in one early episode, over 250 fans sent in handkerchiefs. At its peak, the show received 10,000 fan letters in one week. Critics were convinced of the show’s virtues:

“Without any question whatsoever it is the most charming and heartwarming excursion into pure make-believe that is to be found in television today. The program has acquired a personality which is utterly engaging and completely habit-forming.”

Jack Gould, The New York Times

“You didn’t just watch their show each day, you shared in it. You partook of it. You lived it with them. *Kukla, Fran and Ollie* was important to the development of television, and it was also inestimably important to the development of those who tuned in.”

Tom Shales, The Washington Post

“*Kukla, Fran and Ollie* was originally a children’s show but it has been adopted by the adults. It is difficult to put the charm of this program into any comprehensible prose. You’ll just have to see it for yourself. Don’t see it just once, though. It takes a while.”

John Crosby, New York Herald Tribune

The 20 black-and-white kinescopes in the set, which retails for \$14.95, have undergone extensive audio and video restoration to provide the best possible presentation of these early films. For more information on *Kukla, Fran and Ollie*, visit kukla.tv/press.html. For a screening copy or to arrange interviews with Burr’s colleagues, contact Mark Milano at info@kukla.tv or at the number above.